

Homeless Persons in Cambridge

2000-2001

Homelessness has been evident in the city of Cambridge for years, and accounts for a considerable amount of activity throughout the city. Over the course of the past two years, there have been 273 arrests of homeless persons, which accounts for 10% of the arrests made throughout 2000-2001 time span. Many of the offenders are repeat offenders, and many are know to the city. High traffic areas usually produce the highest amount of homeless persons, such as Central Square, Harvard Square, Inman Square, as well as areas where there are shelters such as 240 Albany St. The following report depicts what crimes have been occurring in Cambridge, and by which homeless persons. This information is broken down numerically and spatially, and highlights the top homeless offenders based on past offenses.

Crime	2000 Arrests	% of total 2000 arrests for this crime	2001 Arrests	% of total 2001 arrests for this crime
Arson	0	0%	0	0%
Assault – Aggravated	9	6%	4	3%
Assault – Simple	11	7%	16	10%
Auto Theft	0	0%	1	1%
Burglary – home or business	8	5%	7	5%
Burglary – from motor vehicle	1	1%	2	1%
Disorderly/Affray	7	5%	10	7%
Domestic Disturbance	0	0%	1	1%
Drinking in Public	30	20%	16	10%
Driving/Traffic Offenses	1	1%	0	0%
Forgery/Fraud	0	0%	1	1%
Indecent Assault	2	1%	0	0%
Indecent Exposure	8	5%	2	1%
Larceny/Theft (excluding shoplifting & larceny from MV)	6	4%	3	2%
Misc./Warrants	1	1%	3	2%
Murder	0	0%	0	0%
Narcotics Possession/Sale	8	5%	10	7%
OUI	0	0%	0	0%
Peeping and Spying	0	0%	1	1%
Prostitution	0	0%	0	0%
Purchasing Alcohol for a Minor	0	0%	0	0%
Rape	1	1%	0	0%
Receiving Stolen Property	3	2%	2	1%
Robbery	4	3%	4	3%
Shoplifting	28	18%	26	17%
Trespassing	19	12%	7	5%
Vandalism	5	3%	3	2%
Violation of Restraining Order	1	1%	1	1%
Weapons Violations	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	153		120	

Crime

The Crime Analysis Unit (CAU) understands that the complaint of the average citizen or business is “visible” problems such as public intoxication, aggressive panhandling, and sleeping on public benches – *not* criminal incidents. However, the CAU suspects that if the average citizen or business comprehended the extent of crimes committed by homeless individuals – particularly in the Central Square area – their priorities would rapidly shift. Here are some quick facts:

- ▶ 10% of all arrests from January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2001 in our arrest database involve an offender who gives his/her address as “homeless” or as one of the known shelters in Cambridge, Somerville, or Boston. We expect this percentage would be higher if we broadened our search to include shelters in other cities and towns, but we do not have all of this address data.
- ▶ The most common address given by someone arrested in Cambridge is 240 Albany St., accounting for 51% of the arrests since January 1st, 2001. The second most common is simply “homeless”.
- ▶ Four out of five most common addresses given by persons arrested in Cambridge indicate homelessness or residence at a homeless shelter (the fifth, which is a short-term residences on Mass. Ave., indicates transience but is not counted in our “homeless” statistics).

The 5 Most Common Addresses Given by Persons Arrested in Cambridge Since January 1st, 2000

240 Albany St. (CASPAR)	139
“Homeless”	113
Long Island Shelter, Boston	7
Residence on Mass. Ave.	4
Pine Street Inn, Boston	2

Though accounting for about .5% of the population in Cambridge, homeless individuals make up 10% of the total arrests. Crimes influenced heavily by vagrant activity include simple assault (usually homeless fighting each other), burglary of homes, businesses, and automobiles, disorderly conduct, drinking in public, indecent exposure (“flashing” or public urination), and trespassing. In 2000, there was an arrest of a homeless man in one rape incident, which was in Area 4. Crime concerns dealing with the homeless and vagrancy since the beginning of 2000 include the following:

- ▶ **Shoplifting** consisted of the most frequent crime in 2001 with 26 out of 120 incidents, while it was the second highest in 2000, accounting for 28 out of 153 incidents. The Cambridge-side Galleria, Harvard Square’s, and Central Square’s plethora of retail establishments are sure bets for shoplifting, as they were in over 50% of the arrests in 2000-2001.
- ▶ **Aggravated Assaults** committed by homeless people against homeless people. The major hotspot over the past two years has been in and around Harvard Sq. Areas such as the pit have hosted various incidents, including one in late September of 2000 where two homeless men assaulted a third, but only one arrest was made as the second culprit fled to an unknown location. A more serious event happened in late May of 2001 when there was an altercation over money and the homeless man involved threatened his victim with a machete before fleeing in a van. Other hotspots include Central Square and Porter Square where arguments more frequently break out when alcohol is involved. Frequently, situations arise after a domestic altercation and/or when service is denied at a local bar or liquor store.
- ▶ **Trespassing** arrests are usually the result of sleeping in ATMs, attempting to enter commercial locations that these persons have been denied access to, as well as going onto campuses like M.I.T. and into their buildings. This offense has dropped by 63% in 2001, from nineteen to seven arrests.

- ▶ **Disorderly/Affray** incidents involve situations that range from not cooperating with the police, acting belligerent due to intoxication, yelling obscenities, to urinating in public. Many of these incidents took place in Central Square, largely due to the fact of the availability of liquor.
- ▶ **Simple Assaults** usually occur for such similar reasons as aggravated assaults. Arguments develop as the result of domestic situations, usually when liquor is involved and are also between two or more homeless people. Nineteen percent of the arrests have occurred at local shelters such as 240 Albany St.
- ▶ **Drinking in Public** is most commonly done areas such as Central Square, Harvard Square, and in parks such as Sennott and Vellucci. Eighty-two percent of arrests in 2001 were during the warmer months from May to September, while fifty-six of the arrests in 2000 were executed during these months. Although the Cambridge Police have been 'cracking down' on this crime over the past few years, it certainly occurs far more frequently than the arrest reports indicate.

Offenders

The offenders in Cambridge whom are homeless are usually know to the Cambridge Police Department, and many of the offenders have a criminal record that dates back to years ago. The following are some statistics on this population with the city of Cambridge:

- ▶ There are 272 homeless individuals in our arrest database, covering January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2001. This number has experienced a significant decrease of 35% from November, 1996 to June, 1999 when there were 421 individuals.
- ▶ Each individual has been arrested an average of 1.2 times. The most prolific repeat offenders have been arrested five times each. There are four of these individuals in our 2000-2001 arrest database.
- ▶ 10% (26) offenders are female while 90% (246) are male.
- ▶ The oldest person is 67; the youngest is 15. The average age of an arrested homeless offender is 39.
- ▶ Most arrested homeless offenders are between the ages of 32 and 49. This age range accounts for 55% of the arrests from 2000-2001.
- ▶ There are 37 repeat offenders ranging from two to five arrests, which accounts for 14% of the homeless arrested population. Of the 272 arrests made, this selected population is accountable for 36% of the arrests.

Hot Spots

The following is an analysis of where the hot spots for homeless activity to occur. As in the past, these areas are constant 'hang outs' for homeless people to gather and in some cases, to sleep.

1. **240 Albany St.:** Many incidents that occur at this location involve the residents of the shelter at this address. Typical situations involve verbal/physical quarrels between to homeless people, often involving an intoxicated party.
2. **Central Square/400-500 block of Mass Ave.:** The majority of homeless arrests are executed in this area. Since Central Square experiences such high foot and mobile traffic, it serves as a great outlet for homeless people to panhandle and steal from stores. Along with numerous liquor stores, Central Square has become a known 'hang-out' area for homeless persons.
3. **Galleria Mall:** situations that rise in this area usually involve shoplifting. Due to the commercial area, many homeless persons attempt to steal items from the Galleria and either pawn it on the street or stores. A popularly targeted item is compact disks and cassette

tapes, which can later be pawned at numerous local used music establishments that ask no questions and require no identification from the sellers.

4. **Inman Square/1300 Cambridge St.:** Sporadic problems near CCH in the early morning hours. Citizens also complain about intoxicated homeless persons in Vellucci Park.
5. **Harvard Square:** A majority of incidents that occur here are due to vagrancy and intoxication. Homeless people tend to 'hang-out' in areas like these where a large amount of people are, and more opportunity for theft presents itself. Another common offense is trespassing onto campuses such as Harvard where homeless people are not allowed.
6. **Cambridge Common:** Out of the seven incidents in the Common, six were for either drinking in public, possession of narcotics, or indecent exposure.
7. **Porter Square:** Many complaints coming from Porter Square were from citizens and business owners for homeless persons hanging out in the area. They were irritating customers, especially in front of CVS Pharmacy on White St. in the Porter Square Shopping Center.
8. **Fresh Pond Mall:** Of the seven arrests reported from this shopping plaza, six were of shoplifting and the remaining one arrest was for drinking in public.

